

# Frequently Asked Questions on Mississippi Issues

(...and How to Answer Them)

## Don't our schools need more money?

Governor Barbour doesn't believe we should ever shortchange education. However, State funding for K-12 education has gone up 50% over the last 5 years – the 4<sup>th</sup> highest rate of spending nationally. Governor Barbour's budget increases overall funding for MAEP by 4%, or \$70 million. During the state's worst budget crisis, the State Department of Education wants a 15% increase over last year for virtually the same number of students! Most of Mississippi's school districts are holding \$240 million – or 11% of their total funding -- in reserve funds they can tap for just a situation like this. And remember, last year's threat of 4,000 teacher layoffs across the state never materialized and won't this year either.

## What can be done to save Mississippi Medicaid from going broke?

Mississippi Medicaid is growing out-of-control. Governor Barbour tried to move 6% of Mississippi's Medicaid recipients to federal Medicare coverage to help save the program. Since a federal judge has blocked that reform, the Legislature is now reforming Medicaid in ways that affects 100% of the Medicaid population. Governor Barbour is now offering every Medicaid recipient a physical and help in finding a reliable place to get preventive health care. And taxpayers should know that, for the first time, Mississippi will be interviewing Medicaid recipients to make sure that the *only* people on our Medicaid rolls are the truly needy.

## How can the state save money to fix the budget crisis?

Do you think state government is running as efficiently as possible? Governor Barbour doesn't think so either. The Governor led Mississippi to one of its largest one year savings in state history last

year. This year, Governor Barbour wants to give all state agencies lump sum budgets and flexibility to reorganize and “smart-size” without burdensome, inefficient state Personnel Board restrictions. This measure could save Mississippi another \$100 million. Don’t believe the big labor unions who accuse the Governor of wanting to replace workers with friends. Governor Barbour is talking about saving money and you can’t do that by just re-filling state employee positions. Governor Barbour is also working to create a fleet management system to get a handle on the 9,000 state vehicles (that’s right – 9,000) that are helping drive Mississippi’s budget problems.

### Isn’t a cigarette tax hike a good way to fix the budget crisis?

Don’t think a 50 cent cigarette tax hike is a magical solution. A mere \$60 million does nothing to fix a near \$1 billion problem. To tax our way out of the budget mess left over from the previous administration, Mississippi would have to raise all taxes by 20% – sales, income and corporate. That would devastate Mississippi’s recovering economy and do nothing to control spending. Governor Barbour is against raising anybody’s taxes. Besides, cigarette smokers tend to be Mississippi’s poorest citizens and a horrible place to balance the budget.

### Why should Mississippi take money from “The Partnership”?

A 2003 Legislative PEER report found that “The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi” organization formed by former Attorney General Mike Moore was “unconstitutional” and should be dissolved. But the real question is this: *If you had a \$1 billion state shortfall, access to \$20 million in new money, and the choice to spend it on anti-tobacco advertising or on poor children and adults who don’t have enough money for the life-saving drugs and treatments they need to live -- regardless of how noble the prevention program may be -- how would YOU spend the money?* Besides, can’t the personal injury trial lawyer friends of Mike Moore who became billionaires from the original tobacco settlement donate enough to privately fund Mississippi’s anti-tobacco programs?